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Negotiating Identities in the Transition from Graduate Student to Teacher Educator

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Abstract: Although practitioners, policy-makers, and academics call for reform in teacher education, there is ambiguity surrounding the identity transformation of graduate students who “become” teacher educators. This self-study uses narratives, based on intricate personal and collaborative reflection, to explore how the assumption of new role identities is an intricate and ongoing process of learning and reflection. In addition to considering the complexities and interrelationships inherent in role socialization, implications for teacher education practice and policy are raised. We conclude that it is beneficial, for both teacher educators and preservice teachers, to engage in collaborative and relational forms of self-study that foster educative understanding and heightened awareness of professional identity.

Introduction

Over the last four decades, practitioners, policy-makers, and academics have emphasized the need for reform in teacher education (Beynon, Grout & Wideen, 2004; Koerner, 1963; Russell, 2005; Tyson, 1994; Wideen & Grimmer, 1997). In response to these calls for reform, many Canadian teacher education programs have established clinical professor or graduate student teaching positions to provide teacher to pre-service teacher training (Beynon et al., 2004). As teachers enter graduate school, they often make the transition to the role of teacher educator with little formal support from the university institution for continuing development (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005; Zeichner, 2005). Therefore, the socialization of school teacher to teacher educator is fraught with tension as teachers attempt to re-identify within new roles.

This paper describes our socialization process into a new community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and how the assumption of new role identities is an intricate and ongoing process of learning and reflection. Narratives, depicting our lived experiences as stories (Ellis, 2004), illuminate the tensions experienced in the process of graduate students “becoming” teacher educators. These narratives are then connected with current theories related to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), teacher educator identity (Beynon et al., 2004; Britzman, 2003), and co-constructive pedagogy (Lambert, 1998) as they relate to identity formation and role socialization. Lastly, for the reader’s consideration, implications for practice are raised on the basis of our analysis of the complex factors and practices that affected our understanding of our new role and identity as teacher educators.

Theoretical Framework

Wenger (1998) theorized that identity is lived, negotiated and social in nature, whereby “identity is a becoming; the work of identity is ongoing and pervasive” (Wenger, 1998, p. 163). To

Wenger (1998), identity is formed through a dialogical process; an experience and its social interpretation inform each other. The individual interprets the meaning of an experience in participation with others in the context of his/her environment. Identity is lived, negotiated and constructed through a process of social interaction in the context of our lived experience. How we construct knowledge about our profession and how we interpret our position are “negotiated in the course of doing the job and interacting with others. It is shaped by belonging to a community but with a unique identity. It depends on engaging practice, but with a unique experience” (Wenger, 1998, p. 146).

Similarly, in the context of teacher education, Britzman (2003) argued that identity is an unstable, contradictory, and unfinalized relation of oneself – identity in teaching is shaped by tensions in the relationship between theory and practice, knowledge and experience, thought and action, technical and existential, objective and subjective. Britzman (2003) theorized these relationships are not neat dichotomies. Rather, she argued, these tensions are dialogical, meaning “they are shaped as they shape each other in the process of coming to know” (p. 26) through social interaction. Engaging in the dialogical relationship of these tensions fashions the way teachers come to understand their practice and the subjectivity of identity through that practice (Britzman, 2003).

Lave and Wenger (1991) further theorized that learning takes place through participation in communities of practice – in workplaces as living social communities. In this conceptualization of practice, there is an emphasis on “the relational character of knowledge and learning, and . . . the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33). Learning must be well situated within the social world of the participants in a community of practice – aiming for full participation in authentic contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The notion of communities of practice places teacher knowledge and learning as situated within the teacher’s own experience; whereby previous experiences facilitate reflection and the transfer of knowledge from one situation to another. By engaging in collaboration with colleagues, teachers construct their own knowledge and understanding of practice. When viewing the socialization and identity formation of teacher educators through the lens of community of practice, collaboration becomes a key mechanism for understanding new roles.

Wenger (1998) acknowledged the roles of newcomers and old-timers to the professional community of practice. Learning through the collaborative efforts of newcomers and old-timers addresses the tension created in the distant relation between experience and current self-projections of competence of the newcomer (Wenger, 1998). Those who are new to the profession begin their new practice on the periphery. However, they cross the boundary into the inner framework of practice by engaging with experienced individuals. As their knowledge and understanding of their new position is co-constructed with colleagues in the process of collaboration, the newcomers become socialized into their new role.

However, in the context of teacher education programs, Beynon et al. (2004) offered an alternative perspective. Their research indicated that teacher educators with experience in the field of teaching bring “a wealth of knowledge about teaching, students and education” (p. 107) to their practice, thus challenging Lave and Wenger’s (1991) perspective of newcomers’ peripheral experiences. In this way, teacher educators are “shifting [their] perspectives from border crossing to building new communities and from forsaking identities to co-constructing new facets to identity” (Beynon et al., 2004, p. 106) through collaborative structures. Beynon et al. (2004) argued that teacher educators create a new third dimension through their socialization with the practice, rather than relinquishing their previous identity.

Within the K-12 system, practitioners also value collaboration as a means to co-construct meaning. Lambert (1998) conceptualized such reciprocal learning as occurring through dialogic reflection, inquiry, dialogue and action. Constructivist pedagogy, as described by Lambert (1998),

enables practitioners to “create mutual trust, hear each other, pose questions and look for answers together, and make sense of our common work” (p. 18).

Despite recent research focusing on the identity of teacher educators (Bullough, 2005; Pinnegar, 2005), the specific experience of graduate students “becoming” teacher educators is an area that is relatively unexplored. Although “teacher educators have the greatest potential for impacting the belief, behaviour, thinking and development of [preservice teachers’] teaching prowess” (Pinnegar, 2005, p. 276), little attention has been given to the tensions between how teacher educators position themselves to their students and how teacher educators are positioned by their students. Assuming a multiplicity of identities (e.g., practitioner, graduate student, and teacher educator) is an intricate and ongoing process of learning and reflection.

Methodology

To explore the notion of “becoming” teacher educators, we examined our individual and collective experiences of navigating diverse roles as practitioner (school teacher), theorist (teacher educator), and graduate student. Self-study was the main research approach we used to explore identity across roles and situations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and to uncover “deeper understandings of the relationship between teaching about teaching and learning about teaching” (Loughran, 2007, p. 12). As described by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), we were drawn to self-study as an approach to “provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm or settle” (p. 20).

In this qualitative study, we assumed “dual identities of academic and personal self to tell autobiographical stories” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740) or narratives “that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). In the spirit of collaboration, understanding, openness, and honesty, we have engaged in “emotional recall” (Ellis, 2004, p. xvii) and “systematic sociological introspection” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 752). Through the examination of individual and collective experiences, reflections, and learnings, we became the “research subject[s]” of our self-study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 636).

Recognizing a predominance of questions or criticisms toward self-study as scholarly research, we have drawn extensively on Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2001) guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. Although our narratives and accompanying analysis only tell part of the story about “becoming” teacher educators, we aimed to provide a self-study that

...attends to the “nodal moments” of teaching and being a teacher educator and thereby enables reader insight or understanding into self, reveals a lively conscience and balanced sense of self-importance, tells a recognizable teacher or teacher educator story, portrays character development in the face of serious issues within a complex setting, gives place to the dynamic struggle of living life whole, and offers new perspective. (p. 19)

Data sources, collected regularly over ten consecutive months, included copies of e-mail messages and transcribed conversational accounts related to our teaching experiences and institutional practices. Both researchers wrote detailed reflexive narratives about negotiating tensions between “self and the arena of practice, [and] between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15).

The first stage of data analysis occurred while data were being collected; the second stage was undertaken immediately after the completion of data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through grounded thematic analysis, we independently read and constantly compared data to identify and categorize patterns and emergent themes related to the purpose of study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). After independent analysis, we met to identify common themes and to consider counter-interpretations and

apparent differences between our experiences. Data interpretations were then examined in light of the contemporary teacher education literature.

In reporting this self-study, we recognized the complexities and interrelationships between theory and practice; therefore, regular peer debriefings between ourselves and other teacher educators, in addition to sharing emerging insights and seeking external critique at conferences, allowed for consideration of new perspectives when engaging in data analysis. Illustrative narratives and quotations are used to allow readers to assess transferability of the findings to other teacher education environments and policy contexts.

Melody's Narrative

With experience in both primary teaching and administrative roles, I began the transition to teacher educator as a graduate teaching assistant¹ (GTA) in a graduate school program. My role as GTA involved instructing a course entitled *Managing the Learning Environment* that adopted a professional decision-making model in regard to classroom management. Instructing this course involved theorizing about my own practical experiences of managing learning environments – requiring both intuitive and reflective thought on my role as school teacher and administrator.

Prior to arriving on campus, I recognized the complexities of the transition to teacher education. I was excited about the opportunity to work with pre-service teachers, expecting they would approach the teaching profession with enthusiasm. I positioned myself as a successful teacher and leader, idealizing that my experience in both managing my own classroom and leading other teachers would complement the GTA role. Yet I was also unsure about the context of my new experience and my new role as a graduate student.

As a new teacher educator, tensions existed as I sought to make sense of my new role. When arriving at the first instructors' meeting, I felt an overwhelming sense of being misplaced. My assumptions about my colleagues were challenged in the realization that I was the only one of two GTAs among a room of well-seasoned university instructors who was not new to the graduate student experience or to the local school context. As the other instructors shared extensive teaching experience in a local school district, referring to the schools and colleagues they had in common, my own experiences of teaching overseas and in another province seemed irrelevant. A sense of collegiality existed with the group of instructors; they seemed to enjoy gathering together and readily offered to assist newcomers. While the assistance was useful, it was also problematic in that it situated the newcomers in the deficit position of *needing* help. As a confident practitioner from the field, I felt that I had to make sense of my role as instructor in my own way.

Drawing upon my experiences in the field of teaching, I sought collaboration with an individual with whom I could relate. Lisa was a second year graduate student also working as a new instructor in this course. Our collaborative process would mark the beginning of our socialization of graduate students into the role of teacher educator.

The struggle to balance theory and practice within the context of the course and our own learning as instructors required constant consideration. As graduate students, our learning was profoundly situated within the context of theory. The course we instructed also required the students to theorize about their own future practice as teachers, based on their reflections of theory related to student learning, child development and classroom management decision-making. As instructors, Lisa and I both expressed the need for students to understand how the theory in this course related to their

¹ The position of GTA involves instructing a course in the undergraduate teacher education program at the university as a means of receiving graduate student funding. Graduate students are appointed as instructors based on their prior teaching experience in the K-12 school system, knowledge of the course subject matter, and other relevant teaching experience.

future practice in the classroom. This required us to consider our own practice in the field, recognizing that reflection and enquiry are critical factors in the successful practice of new teacher educators (Zeichner, 2005). As new teacher educators, theorizing on our own practice initiated deeper learning for us, too. We did not abandon our understanding of the connection between theory and practice in the field. Rather, our previous understandings of practice and theory were transformed through our dialogue and reflection (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – creating a deeper understanding of how theory was situated within our practice.

The balance between developing my approach to teaching this undergraduate course and engaging in my role as graduate student was constantly shifting. My teaching approach in the classroom management course was informed by my learning in graduate studies. In particular, my choice to adopt a collaborative pedagogical approach that sought input from the students emerged from the study of conflict theory (Quantz, 2007) in one of my graduate courses. In a discussion of systems and conflict theory in schools, Quantz (2007) asserted that conflict is normal and productive in achieving democratic consensus whereby educational leaders relinquish the pressure to aim for policy making through controlled unanimous consent. Rather, they aim for critical dialogue with productive conflict. Quantz (2007) asserted,

When administrators and teachers begin to recognize that their job is not to manage for technical efficiency but to mediate and organize various interests, then they begin to see the social life of their school in much a different light.
(p. 59)

This theory resonated with my own leadership experiences in schools and I sought to apply it to my pedagogical approach in the university classroom.

The course I was instructing considered a professional decision-making model whereby teacher judgments and decisions are made on the basis of fundamental principles related to classroom management. It was my belief that I must model the decision-making process with students by modeling and sharing my own reflection processes. I sought student input about their own needs, desires and values in this course as a means of informing my own pedagogical decisions. Such engagement required a commitment to a dialogical process in the classroom, from both the students and myself (Britzman, 2003).

Yet, this approach was not met with consensus. When I asked the students to provide feedback about how the course was progressing and what I could do as an instructor to better meet their needs, some students struggled to recognize the link between the theory of how teachers engage in decision-making process and the actual pedagogy of this university course. In conflicted discourse, there was resistance to participate by some students who expressed their beliefs that the decisions for how and what to teach should be mine as the course instructor. Some students perceived the process of asking for student involvement as wasting class time. In my own reflections, I recognized a tension between the students' desire to know the management strategies offered in the course without engaging with theories and assumptions underpinning those strategies.

How do I address the needs of those students who would rather that I just “teach them” while also addressing the course objectives to engage in ongoing problem solving and decision-making through critical reflection? I am concerned with making connections – to provide an opportunity for the students to analyze how I engage with the theoretical underpinnings in the decision-making process, while honoring their needs as well. The conflicted dialogue today *is* productive; it can lead to a better understanding and improved learning for the students. (Researcher's Journal, Viczko, 2007)

In reflection, I also experienced a heightened awareness of my positionality as an instructor as I questioned the tenuous relationship between student and instructor at the university level. I recognized how “the students positioned me as knowledgeable and experienced as they sought the *right* way to

approach classroom decisions” (Researcher’s Journal, Viczko, 2007). With a commitment to raising early awareness in the students of the role of the decision-making process in shaping pedagogical processes and relationships, I decided to voyage onward in engaging students in conflicted dialogue.

Debriefing about these conflicted dialogues in my journal and with Lisa enabled me to make sense of the students’ educational needs, while also considering my own emerging questions as a graduate student. Lisa and I discussed an image of our roles as teacher educator as a means to merging the paradigm shifts in our thinking through graduate school and our teaching experiences from the field:

Previous experience, theories of practice, interactions with colleagues and students in dialogical processes of developing collaborative pedagogy act as simultaneous multi-layered trajectories that are merged and funneled through the teacher educator experience. Our understanding of our new roles and the shaping of our identities are informed through these multi-layered trajectories... my graduate school and professional lives are reconciled through my praxis as a teacher educator in such a way that my understandings of my identity as teacher are altered. I wonder in what ways the students’ identity is altered as well? (Researcher’s Journal, Viczko, 2007)

Lisa’s Narrative

I have lived the challenge of managing learning environments in my work as a school teacher and principal. As previously described by Melody, the *Managing the Learning Environment* course adopts a professional decision-making model whereby the teacher is viewed as a reflective practitioner who engages in informed decision-making. Since my own research focuses on reflective and reflexive thinking (Wright, 2009), I embraced this opportunity to model the very practices that I am critiquing in my graduate work.

At the onset, we were expected to provide pre-service teachers with the required knowledge and skills to create and manage socially complex learning environments. At our first instructors’ meeting, it was commonly assumed that teacher educators have great *expertise*. Yet as a new instructor, I was unfamiliar with many of the theoretical perspectives in the course readings and textbook, as well as other institutional requirements. There was an implicit understanding that instructors had the knowledge to understand and the skills necessary to transmit critical components relating to classroom management. I felt vulnerable when seeking clarification about course content and pedagogy. Because I believe that learning is actively constructed, personal and holistic, I wondered how to help students make meaningful connections between theory and practice. During the instructors’ meeting, my questions and suggestions were politely acknowledged, yet often ignored or just noted as items for future consideration. Consequently, these initial interactions heightened the mistrust I already had of academic knowledge that was contradictory to my experiences as a practitioner.

During my graduate studies, I learned to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. However, expectations for instructors to conform to traditional instructional practices represented a different relationship to authority than I had previously experienced in my graduate courses: “Reflection is relatively absent within our intermittent instructors’ meetings. Acknowledging limitations or asking questions is viewed as a sign of weakness, helplessness, or an apparent disregard for established practices” (Researcher’s Journal, Wright, 2007).

One week later, I felt like an imposter as I stood in front of our class. Students expected the “professor” or “*Doctor Wright*” to be the center of knowledge, expertise, power and authority in all matters related to classroom management. With a diminishing sense of confidence, I admitted that I was “only” in a Master’s in Education program. The students looked doubtful and unsure. In my

journal (Wright, 2007), I considered how “my field experiences as a teacher and principal seem highly irrelevant to the role of teacher educator. My professional knowledge and competence are being called into question.”

The education profession is often characterized as being highly normative (Lortie, 1975). During our first class, Lortie’s claim became very relevant as I reflected:

I am frustrated as students seek out standardized answers, step-by-step strategies, and clearly-defined responses to effectively and efficiently address problematic situations that might occur during their upcoming practicum. Students’ expectations and understandings of learning conflict with the constructivist philosophy that informs my practice and *who I am* as a teacher. (Researcher’s Journal, Wright, 2007)

Although I viewed learning as dialectic, collaborative and experiential, I felt intense pressure to systematically transmit theoretical expertise and research-based practices. Melody and I explored constructivist instructional strategies (e.g., case studies, journaling, role-play, study groups, analysis of competing theories, and problem-based enquiry) to help students connect theory to practice. My role as graduate student provided some insight as to how to support the students in the course:

My recent university experience allows insight into student needs and academic demands. I have a realistic sense of what I can “cover” and what students can “absorb.” I will not lecture as I, too, am exploring my own understandings about the course content. Subsequently, I see great merit in stimulating reflective discussions through innovative teaching methods. However, tension exists as the assertion of self as “student” denies my identity as “teacher.” (Researcher’s Journal, Wright, 2007)

When discussing course content or our identity as teacher educators, Melody and I engaged in these same dialectic processes. We escaped from the illusion of expertise and certainty and instead acknowledged and accepted the notion of “not always knowing.” As we taught the course, we individually and collectively engaged in intentional study of our own practice and identity – later, we learned that ongoing engagement in professional reflection and dialogue is *self-study* intent on enhancing professional practice (Bullough, 2005). As teacher educators, we had a responsibility to model reflective practice *for* our students and *with* our students (Kosnik, 2001; Russell, 2005).

One of the required course readings was Grant and Zeichner’s (1984) article on being a reflective teacher. Describing Dewey’s three attitudes that are perquisites to engaging in reflective action, Grant and Zeichner stressed the importance of openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Embodying these attitudes, I applied this *state of mind* and *way of being* to my understanding of identity – self-study allowed me to reconceptualize myself as a reflective and reflexive practitioner who goes beyond routine instruction and impulsive responses to reflection *in, on* and *for* practice (Schön, 1987; Wilson, 2008).

Rather than providing templates or one-size-fits-all prescriptions for practice, Melody and I came to understand how tacit knowledge and educational theory commingle to provide conceptual insights that inform identity and practice. In this more complex, nuanced view of identity, reflection and understanding was incumbent upon our willingness to be vulnerable and take risks. Subsequently, we deliberately engaged students and colleagues in discussions about our role and the pedagogical decisions that we made. Students’ questions and comments prompted reflection on my practice; however, a power imbalance existed despite ongoing efforts to engage in reciprocal forms of learning (Lambert, 1998). I struggled with balancing the empowerment of student voices with the disempowerment of teacher authority. In addition, I was troubled by “contradictory roles and the conflicting need to maintain professional distance and authority as demanded by the institution, with the need to foster trust and develop personal bonds with students to facilitate authentic collaboration and reflection” (Researcher’s Journal, Wright, 2007).

I identified with my students as they tried to make sense of their professional identity. Together, we found it helpful to (a) *identify a need or problematic situation* (What do I/we want to learn or understand? Why is this significant?); (b) *observe, analyze and reflect* (What happened? Why? What theoretical frameworks may inform my/our understanding of this situation?); (c) *engage in reflexive observation and analysis* (What actions did I/we take? Why? What are my/our values, assumptions and beliefs that impact this situation?); and (d) *reconceptualize practice and identity* (Are my/our espoused theories aligned with my/our theories-in-use? Does reflective and reflexive thinking elucidate the need to maintain, modify or change my/our current conceptualizations?) (Wright, 2009). Ironically, paradox existed as I “led” my students through this series of pre-determined questions and detailed steps to foster intuitive forms of reflection. Yet on the other hand, the traditional boundaries between teacher educator and student blurred as we co-constructed meaning and our identities through these questions. The degree to which I understood my identity as a teacher educator influenced and was influenced by the relationships established with students and colleagues (Bullough, 2005).

As I explored the above-mentioned questions within the course and in dialogue with Melody, I was “struck by the degree that the *self*, the *me*, or the *I* defined my practice and its supports or consequences. The awareness of positionality on practice is integral to my identity” (Researcher’s Journal, Wright, 2007). Self-study proved to be problematic as I had to confront taken-for-granted assumptions and think in new ways; yet self-study was liberating as I sought authentic change and a more nuanced understanding. With the goal of embodying Dewey’s attitudes of openmindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness, Melody and I rendered ourselves vulnerable to reconceptualizing and recreating not only our practice, but ourselves. Through reflection, we negotiated new meanings. At times, reflection was enlightening – other times, it was disenchanting, disruptive and alienating.

Discussion of Theory and Practice

In becoming a teacher educator, the identity transformation process involves social interaction in the professional community of instructors and in the instructional community of students. As instructors, we developed dialogical relationships and continuously questioned, “How do we make connections between theory and practice? How does theory inform our own practice? How does our pedagogy support or inhibit students’ identity formation?” In discussing these fundamental questions, we situated ourselves as principal agents in our understanding.

Socialization through Collaboration

This socialization process was foundational in understanding our new roles. Our immediate feelings of being misplaced are explained by Wenger’s (1998) theory of periphery engagement of the newcomer. As newcomers, we struggled to reconcile our past experiences within new contexts. We felt we could not relinquish our previous knowledge and understanding as practitioners. Socializing with experienced instructors and dialoguing with each other about how to make sense of our field practice in the context of our new environment shaped the third new dimension to understanding our new roles (Beynon et al., 2004). We were cognizant of the need for reflective and reflexive thinking as

Uncritically and unintentionally, many teacher educators appear to follow the traditional view that theory is first taught and then practiced. This traditional view is firmly embedded both in the epistemology of the university and in the curricular organization of the school. (Russell, 2005, p. 151)

In many ways, we operated across and between several distinct and overlapping contextual communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) – our own collaborative duo², a larger group of instructors, the academic institution, and the field. Being committed to plurality of membership required negotiating between the needs of the instructors as a whole and our own needs to “own the course” for ourselves. Ongoing dialogue with colleagues and students heightened our understanding of the importance of collaboration and reflection within a cyclical process of coming *to be*, *to understand*, and *to care*. Each relationship and interaction contributed to our socialization into this community of practice and resulted in a reconstructed understanding of our identity as teacher educators.

Possibilities and Tensions in Co-Constructing Identity

Relational engagement within collaborative structures was integral to identity transformation. As new teacher educators, the experience of co-constructing meaning with each other and our students aligned with Lambert’s (1998) conceptualization of reciprocal learning. The collaborative process was the forum for reciprocal learning (Lambert, 1998) that supported learning within the context of reflection, enquiry, dialogue and action – not only with each other, but also with the larger group of instructors. For example, we initiated an “Instructors’ Collaboration Forum” whereby instructors shared teaching strategies and resources and examined long-standing practices and problematic situations. Similarly, engaging with students in constructivist pedagogies allowed for the co-construction and identification of shared values for both the instructors and students.

However, Lambert’s view of co-construction does not significantly address the tensions created in power relations between student and instructor. The notion of co-construction assumes that vested individuals operate on an equal level. Tisdell (1998) theorized that teachers must recognize their positionality by situating themselves within the context of their position to critically reflect on the power and privilege afforded to them through their position. Engaging in this process brings awareness of a teacher’s power in the classroom as instructor. Tisdell (1998) argued that by becoming aware of positionality, individuals begin to recognize whose knowledge is privileged within the context of the school and larger educational system. This was evident when students were sometimes reluctant and even resisted opportunities to provide input as to what they needed from the course and our instruction.

Living and Negotiating Identities

Today, we are no longer preoccupied with relinquishing our identity as a practitioner or graduate student – we now honour our accumulated craft expertise as building upon existing work related to teacher education, in addition to contributing to and generating new theoretical and professional knowledge (Zeichner, 2007). As we seek ways to move beyond typical university models of technical rationality, this self-study illustrated Schön’s (1987) description of learning and reflection as the integration of theory and practice through a “dialogue of thinking and doing to which I become more skillful” (p. 31). The tension between being an expert and novice was slightly alleviated as we gained a new appreciation for what constitutes educational knowledge (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Reflective thinking that was practitioner-generated and based on intuitive knowledge derived from

² Although we benefited from dialectic interactions with the larger group of instructors who also taught the *Managing the Learning Environment* course and other forms of institutional support such as pedagogical support provided by the course coordinator, this self-study specifically focuses on our negotiation of identity within our collaborative duo. Even though we continuously collaborated with the other instructors, we were drawn together because of similar circumstances. We were both new to academia – having recently left our own local school contexts to assume our first teacher education positions while engaged in full-time graduate coursework.

school, graduate study, and university experiences provoked alternative ways of thinking about being a teacher educator in terms of both theory and professional practice.

Implications for Practice

Our self-study highlights the tensions between theory and practice. Graduate students often live out opposing identities in the classroom – those expected to “know” and provide definitive answers versus those who “question” and accept ambiguity. These tensions are not always acknowledged, but are often felt by many teacher educators. Self-study afforded us a space to negotiate our multiple roles and unique identities. Becoming a teacher educator is not merely beginning a new process; rather it is the result of complex dialogic processes and ongoing negotiation of current tensions with previous experiences (Britzman, 2003; Bullough, 2005). Intuitive reflection on previous experiences provides insight for teacher educators as they address the tensions of identity in the university organization. Becoming conscious of processes that shape practice is critical for socialization into the role of teacher educator.

Pre-service teachers showed significant interest in practice as it related to connecting theory to their future practice. In sharing their practical experiences with students, teacher educators must be aware of the impact that their exemplars have on students’ perceptions of “good practice.” Modeling of practice, without thorough critique of its impact on students, can lead to problematic assumptions of what constitutes “good practice.” Subsequently, we engaged pre-service teachers in critical dialogue of the curriculum and pedagogies in the courses. Reflection and constructivist pedagogy created structures for dialogue predicated on the understanding of diverse perspectives. Being both a graduate student and teacher educator was beneficial – our students experienced and learned that knowledge is actively constructed rather than disseminated by an academic “expert.” Over time, our understanding of what constitutes educational research was broadened.

In order to appreciate how others’ perspectives may be marginalized on an individual or systemic basis, teacher educators need to be aware of how their position values or de-values the experiences and knowledge of others within the given community of practice. This awareness of the impact of positionality on one’s own sense of knowledge is essential to the ongoing identity formation of teacher educators. Tisdell (1998) theorized that identity shifts occurring through awareness of positionality affect what we can “understand, see, hear, attend to, voice or construct as knowledge at any given moment” (p. 154). Given the complex tensions inherent in identity formation, some teacher educators may choose to disengage from the collaborative process, as disengagement is often made convenient by the autonomous nature of university instructing. Such disengagement often perpetuates status quo practices that marginalize individuals and groups. Recognizing that socialization into the role of teacher educator is informed through social interaction and the co-construction of knowledge, it is important that collaborative practice is valued within the structure of the university (Zeichner, 2007). Collaborative and reciprocal interactions inherent in self-study were helpful in illuminating the complex relationships representing privilege and power that would otherwise go unnoticed.

As Lisa previously described, self-study was also problematic and disruptive. Self-study forced us to confront *who we are* and *who we might be* as teachers. As we administered multiple choice exams over assessment narratives, we were disappointed that conflicting time constraints (balancing our marking as instructors with upcoming graduate assignments) resulted in the misalignment of our espousals with theories-in-use (Schön, 1987). The emphasis on consistent delivery of the course was problematic as we lacked the authority to differentiate course content and assignments to meet the specific needs of the students we taught. In compelling ourselves to be more transparent and accountable for our practice, we questioned how our own (or the institution’s) practices might promote or prevent learning.

The field of teacher education is evolving (Beynon et al, 2004). Implications of this evolution require those involved in teacher education policies to pay attention to current research and trends. Robinson and McMillan (2006) were clear in their directives for teacher educator practice whereby “reflection and enquiry need to become essential aspects of the lives of teacher educators” (p. 328). As Zeichner (2005) also argued that teacher educators are committed in their desire to be effective in their practice, teacher educators need to embrace reflection and enquiry into their practice and university policy makers should support teacher educators’ endeavours to do so. Additionally, as graduate students assume teacher educator roles, consideration also needs to be given to the impact that teaching and self-study have on the graduate students’ ability to engage deeply in their own coursework and research programs.

Self-study supported our identity formation as teacher educators in addition to promoting pre-service teachers’ identity formation (Pinnegar, 2005). Self-study that incorporates reflection through professional journaling, action research, mentoring of new instructors, and coaching should be promoted as discursive practices that may inform teacher education policies and practices in and elucidate new possibilities for research in understanding teacher identity formation. Although self-study privileged our voices in our analysis of practice and self (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2007), we lived self-study as a collaborative and shared commitment rather than a singular and individualistic approach to learning and teaching (Loughran, 2007). For both of us, educative understanding was developed through the relational aspect of this collaborative form of self-study.

Closing Reflections

In completing this self-study, we found heightened professionalism in the process of collaboration. In addition to ongoing collaboration with the larger group of instructors, working with a colleague who both shares and challenges our beliefs of teaching fostered critical self-reflection and reflexive thinking. Becoming aware of the practices and processes shaping our own identity increased our awareness of the importance of seeking future collaboration with the students we teach, other teacher educators, and graduate student colleagues.

Writing narratives about our personal experiences and our collaborative perspectives proved challenging. As our identities and knowledge were constructed through collaborative dialogue, it was difficult to extract an embedded understanding for critical analysis. Just as reflecting in collaboration provided one method of self-reflection, debriefing our personal reflections after collaborative dialogue also increased understanding of our transition from graduate student to our new role as teacher educator. Through self-study, focused on intricate personal and collaborative reflection, we positioned our own and our students’ multiple and shifting identities at the forefront of our thinking and practice.

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